

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL  
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: MARY PODGORSKI  
INTERVIEWER: OLGA SPANDAGOS  
DATE: NOVEMBER 14, 1985**

**O = OLGA  
M = MARY**

**Tape 85.28**

O: Okay, my name is Olga Spandagos. This is November 14, 1985. And I'm here to interview Mary Podgorski. Okay, Mary can you just tell me a little bit about your origin?

M: Well I was born in [unclear] Poland, November 1<sup>st</sup> 1907, and lived in the village for four years. I don't remember too much of village life I'm sorry to say. It seems other people can remember when their mother's carried them on their arms, but I don't. My father had come on to America before us, but by the time there was enough money for us to come over, he was killed. So it was through my uncle that we came to America.

O: So your uncle was already here?

M: My uncle was already here. He lived in Lowell. He was a third-hand in the Prescott Mills. And ah, they owned their own home at the time, which I thought was, which I think today was unusual. He came after us so that when we left Ellis Island he was there for us, and brought us on right into the city of Lowell.

O: So he waited for you at Ellis Island (M: Right) until you got there?

M: Yes.

O: Okay, and what year was that when you came over?

M: We came over November 1911 on the Ship Celtic, which since has gone down into the ocean. [Laughing]

O: Can you tell me about um, what your trip was like coming over on the Celtic?

M: I don't remember too much about the trip. I do remember my mother saying that she was ill during the whole trip. And that I was running around, and bringing her water, and uh, and paying no heed to whatever. She said that hey the sailors used to swing me on the swings on the deck, which I thought was, you know, quite nice. Other than that I don't remember any hardship there, but I do remember my mother always staying in the bunk because she was too ill to get up.

O: Do you, did your mother ever tell you anything about the trip? Things that you don't remember, but things that she told you, like the other people that were on the ship?

M: Well there was many people that were ill, and everybody just was waiting to see shore. I don't know how many days it took us. I mean that's something that I never knew, but it was a long trip, and they were very happy when they saw land. The ordeal of being at Ellis Island, not knowing whether they would pass or not because they were rejected for vision and different ailments that people had, but luckily we got through. My mother was bringing over a feather bed, embroidered pillow cases, shawls, woolen shawls, this was their possession that they took with them. Like I say, when, when we did come out of Ellis Island my uncle was there to tend to us.

O: And um, you came directly to Lowell?

M: Came to Lowell into his home. We lived there with them. And my mother went into the mills shortly after. She was learning to weave in the weave room. And ah, when she did get three looms, because at that time they were getting three looms to work on, she was making \$3.60 a week. From this \$3.60 she had to payback her fare which was ninety dollars, and at the same time keep body and soul together for herself and for me.

O: And were you... Did you live with your uncle for long?

M: We lived with my uncle and my aunt, but not too long. They lived past the Aiken Bridge, that section of the city. And most of the Polish people were up higher here in Centralville, which was closer to the mills. So that we moved from my uncle's and we went boarding with a friend, no relation just somebody that my mother I guess got to know working in the factory.

O: When you first came over obviously your mother didn't speak English right? How was she able to get along without knowing English? Was it an equal problem for her?

M: I don't think it was a problem because there was so many here at the time that were like her, that didn't speak English, but there were people like my uncle who was a third hand, who knew some English that would interpret. You know, they...and this way they got along fine, because we belong to the Polish church, and it was just Polish Jews there. There were Polish stores, grocery stores. There were Polish bakeries, and we mingled with the Polish people. So it wasn't a hardship...ah...at all.

O: So did you grow up in the same neighborhood?

M: Well, we stayed in Centralville for most of my life.

O: And most of the people there were Polish?

M: Well yes, there was a large number of Polish people in Centralville. We have our church right here on Lakeview Avenue. I belong to St. Casimir's. And the stores were around here too. So it was no hardship. We didn't have any means of transportation other than your feet and your legs, but it was no hardship! I mean they walked to work. They could walk to church. They could walk over the bridge and they would be the stores if they had any money to buy anything. So it was no... You know today we can't seem to get along without an automobile, but then an automobile was a rarity and a luxury.

O: So can you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood that you live in and the other people that were in your neighborhood? Other than the Polish were there other ethnic?

M: Oh yes, there was a lot of Irish in Centralville and they gave us a hard time. [Laughing] At first the, well the Yankees had most of the property in the beginning, and they were reluctant to give the Polish tenements until they found out that they were clean and kept them clean. There was a lot of Irish around here too, and there was plenty of name calling. I don't know what the resentment was now that I'm older. Why, why there was this resentment, because more or less we were all in the same boat. I mean America was a melting pot of not only one nationality, but there was this resentment.

O: What did you think back then growing up, what did you think of this resentment, and why did you think that there was resentment?

M: Truthfully I don't know why. I mean to say why was it, they weren't any better off than we were perhaps they were here a little earlier than some of us. My uncle had come in 1901. So he was here, you know, sometime before we came, and he became a citizen of the United States. So we weren't that bad off you know. I wasn't. I didn't think I was because you know, there was always my uncle there that... But I went...when I went to school I didn't know a word of English, and you learn so fast that now when I think of them having Spanish teachers for the Spanish, it is such a mistake. It is such a mistake. We had Polish school after school. So that later on when I was older I had to go to Polish School after I came back from English school. You came home and got a slice of bread and butter, and picked up your Polish books and ran to the church. And the priest would teach us the reading, the writing, the history of Poland.

O: What was school like? What...did you go to school... a lot of Polish kids?

M: All Polish. Oh you mean English school?

O: Yah, English school.

M: Oh English school was a mixture.

O: Mixture?

M: Oh yes, there was a mixture.

O: Did you, were your friends there usually Polish children, or?

M: Oh yah, there was always the Polish children.

O: You didn't hang out with the Irish or the?

M: Yah, we were friendly with some Irish in the later grades, but in the beginning you stayed with your own. Later on as you grew older and you were freer to mingle you had...

O: So when you were younger you your parents restricted you to stay with Polish people?

M: No they didn't restrict us, but we lived in a six-family house. At the time everybody in the house was Polish. Next door people were Polish. Across the street were the cobbler who was Polish, and it was like Polish colony.

O: And later on you mentioned you did have friends who were Irish?

M: Oh yes.

O: So you didn't just socialize with just the Polish?

M: Oh no. Later on we played on the street with [rolleevo] and hopscotch, and all those with the other nationality children. Somehow I think not knowing the history of people there's a resentment, but later on as you grow older and you know that they had hardships in Ireland, and they do to this day just as we have in Poland under the Russian regime, you should think differently, but when you're young you don't think of this. You just think of well gee willikins, you know, they're calling me names. And so you'll call them back. You know you're not, you're no angel, and you don't stand there and take it.

O: What was your family life like, your house, your daily routine, what did you usually do, you know?

M: Well when we were boarding with these people, I didn't have too much to do other than come home for lunch, and the lady of the house would have lunch ready for me. And then when my mother would come from work she would, you know, take care of me. I had one dress, one dress, and my mother use to knit my stockings with all the different kinds of yarn that she had. So that the two weren't alike, but you were covered and that's all that mattered, and you were clean. Later on my mother was able to take a tenement and at that time tenements were three dollars a week. And we had gas light, which I thought was great because when we were boarding I lived up in the attic with my mother. We had one room. And the only thing we had that was of any heat was a lamp that...one of these round dome lamps that my mother use to have a little, little kettle and she would heat the milk on it for me at night. And she would put the curling iron in there to curl my hair. That lamp was the center of necessity, but after that my

mother was able to take a tenement. It was three dollars a week. And we had gas and I thought that was so great, because the gas light was so much brighter than the lamp light, and we also had a small gas stove beside the old black stove that you burned wood and coal in. And to me it was a luxury, just a luxury to have three rooms instead of just one room.

O: And what were the three rooms? They were one bedroom, or?

M: There was the kitchen and a small room off the kitchen, which was my room. And the large room was my mother's room, and that had a round table and a linoleum...and not a floor, but a linoleum. It was great. You know, it was a responsibility, because then I had more responsibility, because my mother would start the fire in the morning, wood fire and cook the breakfast and then she had to go to work. And I would have to shift for myself, and run home at noon time and get something to eat. And then when I came home for four o' clock, or quarter of four, I would have to sift the ashes from the day before and get the fire going. And if there was potatoes to peel, peel the potatoes and keep them cooking. And I would run to Polish school across the street.

O: Did you live in that section...your first tenement for very long or did you move?

M: Oh no, we lived there for a long, long time, a long, long time.

O: And (uh) I was just curious, the woman that you boarded with, was she Polish?

M: Oh yes, oh yes!

O: And what about your tenement who owned the tenement?

M: Polish people owned the house.

O: They owned the house. Did they live in the same?

M: Yes they owned in the front we had the...the other tenements were...

O: So you lived there all that time?

M: Yes.

O: Can you tell me about the Polish school that you went to afterwards? The kind of...

M: Oh gosh, it was just one class, smaller children and larger, because the young children would have the elementary book. And then there would be the first reader, and the second reader, third reader and fourth reader, and then the history. So as you grew you grew into these readers. And finally when you got to be in the history you were already in the seventh or eighth grade in the grammar school. So that...

O: How many years was the Polish School?

M: How many years?

O: How many years did you go there?

M: [Sighed] Gosh, many years. [Laughing] I started with the elementary and the first reader, second reader. I stopped going to Polish School I think when I was in the ninth grade. So all those years I went to Polish School.

O: Did you go every single day or?

M: No, you went during the week, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and on Sunday afternoon you went for catechism. But Polish School wasn't only reading and writing, it was also, we had plays. You know, the priest would teach us plays. So you took part in plays. And every time you were in a play your mother would make you a new dress. So we always wanted to be in a play because you would have a new dress. Then you belonged to the choir, the junior choir, so that you were taking part on singing. So you would go to choir practice. Life was around the church, and that's...

O: And ah, which church was this?

M: St. Casmir's on Lakeview Avenue.

O: There are two Polish Churches, right?

M: Yes. There's Holy Trinity up on High Street, which is a Roman Catholic Church, and St. Casmir's is a National Catholic Church. We are not under the Pope.

O: What's the difference? Is that...The difference is just that you're not under the Pope?

M: That's right we are self-governed.

O: Uh huh.

M: We have a church committee, and every four years there is a synod that lay people as well as clergy attend to, where the rules and regulations of the church are made, and carried out.

O: Rules and regulations of the church uh, not...you mean how the church is going to be run, but not necessarily um, you know the beliefs of the church?

M: No not necessarily the beliefs. We are very much like the Roman Catholic as far as the rituals of the ceremony, the religion. The thing is we are not governed by the Pope. We are governed by the Prime Bishop who is stationed in Scranton, Pennsylvania. And then we have a diocesan bishop. Like, like, like this dioceses here would have a bishop who stationed um Manchester, and uh...

O: I never realized that there were two Polish...

M: Churches?

O: Um, when did things split?

M: When did they split? In... Our church is eighty-five years old. So I would say may be eighty-six or seven years ago. And the reason for the split was, there's always a reason, many if our polish people lived n Pennsylvania because of the mines, because Poland is well known for her mines. I think it's the third largest in the world of coal mining and many of our people had gone on to Pennsylvania because of their work And at that time in Pennsylvania the church were governed mostly by the Irish or German Bishops. And it was a hardship in the way that they would be compelled to do what they wanted to do. Like say if, if I had a child and I wanted it to be baptized a certain name, they wouldn't baptize it you know, because they figured that wasn't the name to give. That also happened in the old country, because Poland is a Roman Catholic uh, country. When I was born my mother wanted me to be named Amelia, second name, but my first name she wanted as Susan. But the priest wouldn't baptize me Susan because it wasn't a holy name. So they took Mary and of course Amelia was my godmother so I kept the Amelia. They were persecuted in Scranton in many ways, and they rebelled. They didn't like what was happening. They wanted a lot of their Polish ways to be in what they were teaching. And the bishops wouldn't consent to that. So they had asked one of the younger Polish priests who had come on from Poland as a Roman Catholic, and he was stationed in Nanticoke, I think, Pennsylvania, if he would go to Rome and ask the Pope to intercede, and tell them all that was happening in Pennsylvania to the polish people. He did go, but the Pope wouldn't see him. So when he came back and told the people that uh, you know he couldn't have a hearing with the, with the Pope, they said, "Then we shall build our own church." And they asked this priest who was Francis Hoder was his name, if he would lead them, and he said he would. So this is how the church got its beginning. They built the church. Then they wanted it to be catholic. And by not having this priest as a bishop, consecrated as a bishop, they didn't have the Apostolic secession. So this priest went on to, to Europe, and he was ordained bishop by the old Catholic church in [Utric], and that's how we are secession to the Apostolic part of the church. So that we'd not just somebody sprung up from, from the ground and had no lineage behind them. We do. And from then on churches were springing up here, there, you know, all over. And people here in Lowell, when they first came there was no church. Their was no church at all. And they were, most of them were going to the St. Joseph's Shrine and saving their money that if they got enough money together they would build a church, a Polish Church. And when they had quite a bit of money, I don't know the exact amount, when they had quite a bit of money the priest took off with the money. And there was no money left to build the church. So during this time the people in Lowell heard about this priest in Scranton, this father Francis Hoder, if he would come and speak to them. So he did come down, and it was just in somebody's home that they gathered. And they said that they wanted to uh, to start a church of there own, and they would like it to be like the church in Pennsylvania, and not affiliated with Rome. And uh, and the bishop said that it was up to the people that the people wanted so that he would help. So this how started, and uh, they named it St. Casmir's because the men's society was St. Casmir's society. So they took it as the name of the patrons saint for the church. So that's how we...

O: But there is another Polish church, but that's Catholic and its affiliated with Rome?

M: Yes.

O: And that must have come about...

M: They came after us. We are older than they are.

O: And why is it they decided to go with the church affiliated with Rome?

M: Well you know it's pretty hard to come from a country like Poland, and all your life you worshipped the Roman Church. I think it took a lot of courage for people to say that we will leave that church, and go to this one this is the self governing church, more or less you have it's a democratic church. I know the people know where the money go. I mean the priest just can't take off with the money, because we have a treasurer, a secretary, and a committee who governs, you know, as well as the clergy. It isn't that we don't think highly of him, but we work together and not separate. I mean they don't pack the money up in valises and bring it to the bank, and then it's going to go to Rome, or whatever. It stays here, and we in turn support the mother church, because it has to be supported.

O: Which one is larger the Polish National, or the...?

M: No. Holy Trinity is the larger church.

O: A larger church. So all this is a split that occurred just in this country they didn't have that kind of a split in Poland.

M: That came later?

O: That came later uh, and that didn't come easy either. Poland is Roman Catholic country. I mean its been Roman Catholic for centuries and that's the downfall of Poland too, but ah, the people in Poland under, under the Roman Church didn't have to much freedom. You had to more or less do what the church wanted you to do. You could go to school only so many classes and then you know you got no further education. Especially, I'm speaking of the village. Today there's freedom of schooling. You can go to school and you can go further on, and you can educate yourself. But uh, they were restricted because keeping the people unlearned was better for the church.

O: Okay, you said earlier that um the church was sort of the center if the Polish community.

M: Yes, it was.

O: They had the school. And what else did, how else did they control the Polish community?

M: Well we have organizations. You know, there was a lady's organization and is to this day, and the men's organization. There's the choir, there's the school children. Later on also here in



Lowell the Polish people went around collecting ten and twenty-five cents a week from people to build the Polish Home, and that would be the center of outside activities. If there was dances, or theatres because there was a stage there, but this is the way they built it. It was just by going around and collecting from the Polish people enough to build the Polish Hall.

O: And um as you got older you had mentioned that you... first you associated with Polish children then Irish. As you got older did you, you know, join other organizations that were non-Polish?

M: Oh yes I belonged to the International Institute for years. Ah, that used to be a luxury, because they would have games and things there that we at home didn't have, or couldn't afford. So that you also mingled with all nationalities at the International Institute.

O: Can you tell me a little bit about the International Institute, what it is and what they do?

M: A little, the International Institute used to be on Palmer Street for years, and uh, it is supported by the United...what is it that they collect?

O: Um.

M: The United Fund that's collected every year to...for the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts, and I believe that is...And at that time it was also affiliated with the Young Women Christian Association on John Street, which we belong to that also. And we would go to these conferences of the international girls, girls that work in the mills. We used to meet at the Y, and they'd be discussions there. And then once a year you would go to different cities and meet other girls that were from the industrial, uh groups and mingle with them, and exchange you know, what was going on here. And of course we were mostly all here from the mills, because at the time, you couldn't at that time say, "I don't want this work," or choose this or that, because in later years you would have a better having out of it. There was no such thing. There was the mills, and you went into the mills regardless whether you liked it or not. Going for work in the mills was another sad thing. You would go in there, and stand by the door, and stand hoping that you would be take to work; not the work that you knew or liked, but it was work. I remember standing in the door for many, many times, and the superintendent, the, what was the boss, we'd call him the boss, would go by and say, just lift his hands, "Nothing today." So you would go home. And then you would here again that perhaps here they're hiring. You would go there regardless of what kind. You know when I think of today, there's such an opportunity today of doing what, what more or less what you would like to do for the rest of your life. There was no choice then. It was either the show shop, or a mill, and I started in the mills.

O: How old were you when you started working?

M: I believe I was fifteen years old when I started to work in the Hamilton. Up five flights of stairs, picking rollers in the spinning room, with a braid halfway down my back, barely able to reach the rollers and making five dollars a week. I was fifteen years old then, and the reason I had to give up school, because I had first year of high, I couldn't go on, my mother took ill, and there was no means of...

**Side A ends,  
Side B begins.**

O: Okay. So can you tell me a little bit...um, we were talking about work and um...

M: Another time I got a job in the Boott Mill. My mother worked in the Boott Mill, and sometimes if there was vacation time, I would go in with her during noon time, and fill up, she was a weaver. And there was this big round object where the filling was put in, a number of fillings so that the filling has to go into the shuttle and the shuttle goes back and forth and weaves the loom. I would do that for her to fill up, to fill up this, what would I call it? It was like a drum, a small drum where the filling fitted in all around it. And as one would empty out the other the other one would drop in automatically. And I was always so afraid of it, because there were times when the shuttle would go out of kilter and just go flying. And if you were in the way you would get hit. I always feared that job. At that time I wasn't working there I was just helping my mother. But then there was a chance to get a job of filling these little drums and I took it. I didn't work there too, too long because I feared it. I really feared that kind of work. So I went into the twisting room in the Boott Mill, and that was a much nicer job. It was two kinds of threads, twist together in order to make a twisted thread, which they used making the curtains scrim. Boott Mill was known for its curtain material years ago, curtains and toweling. And this was, this twisted thread was used to make the curtains. So I worked on that for quite a long time. Then there were strikes too in the mills years ago. In fact there was a strike not too long after we came to America, because they said in 1911 there was a big strike, and that was the time that we came. Then there was hardship because there was no unemployment security and people didn't make that much to have a large savings ahead of them. So it was really very, very hard. But at that time in the stores the store man would give you a book, and whatever you took would be written down, and than at the end of the week you would pay it. But then there were many weeks where it wasn't paid, but later on people when they did work, they made sure they paid up there debts. I mean this was something that we did. Ah, let's see, where was I now?

O: How many years did you work in the mills all together?

M: Well I work in the mills a long time until the work got slack, and then there was the shoe shops. In the shoe shops they were pretty strong here. We had quite a number of shoe shops here in the city of Lowell. And one of my friends was working in the shoe shops, so she asked for me, and I was able to get a job there. It was the Watson Show shop on Middlesex Street. And I liked that work. It was stitching and I like stitching. And she put me on fancy stitching which later on I went on to a French cord stitcher, which paid better. So I stitched for a long, long time. And then that was seasonal work. There was always, you know, there was so many months you work and then you didn't, because a between the summer shoes, and the winter shoes there was always a break. Then the silk mill came into the city of Lowell. And we heard well in the silk mill they're making big money. Well every body wanted to make more money. So I had friends that worked there in the warp room. This is where you make there big warps that are taken up into the weave room, where in the weave room they weave it into, into a cloth. Well naturally it was silk. So we were warp tenders, and we made pretty good money there. In

fact, when we would go to cash our checks in the bank, they wanted to know where we work, because it was one of the best paying.

O: How much did you make usually?

M: At that time? Do I remember what we made? Let's see what the year was. This was in the late, in the twenties. In the twenties. I would say that we were making around thirty dollars a week.

O: You sound like that was a lot.

M: It was a lot of money, and I was able to keep my mother home then. She didn't have to work. I was able to pay the rent, and you know, things were easier. We bought furniture. We moved to a single house we had a cottage. We didn't buy the cottage, but we rented the cottage. And everything was going fine until the silk mill went on strike, and this was the late twenties. Well we were out of work for a long time, and I had to work because I was the sole bread winner. We heard that there was a silk mills in Rhode Island. So one of my friends and I went to Hillsboro, Rhode Island, and I got a job as a warp tender, and she was, she was a twister, but she couldn't get work. So she got housework because she also had to work. And I work there for I would say two years. I would come home every other week, and bring home the money to keep my mother here. I had lived with Polish people in Cranston, Rhode Island. There was people that worked in Hillsboro from there, so I was able to commute with these people that also worked there. That lasted until the mills started up here again. So then I came back to the silk mill, and worked until 1931. And that was the year I got married. So I worked for not too long after I got married, and I was home.

O: But you never went back to work after you got married?

M: Oh yes, I went back. Ah, the last work that I did, well before the last work, after... I stayed home until my son was about eight years old. And then the Raytheon came here in Andover. So I went to work in the Raytheon for about four years. Then I got laid off there too, because the last one on the list usually in a place like that goes and seniority stays. And then after that I went to as a cafeteria worker in the school system. So that was the last work I did.

O: Can you tell me a little bit about when you work in the mills? What was the typical work day like, and the other people that you worked with? And can you tell me a little bit about the strikes too?

M: When my mother started working she worked from six to six, and Saturday till twelve, so that they got paid on Saturday noontime. When I started working it was eight hours a day, uh you didn't come home for lunch, because you worked you know, in different places. What was it like?

O: How did you usually get the jobs? Was it because you knew someone that worked in the mill or?

M: Sometimes it was through knowing someone, and other times you heard they were hiring there. So you would go, you know, hoping that they would take you, but it's not always that... And you would go back, and back, and back. When I think of it today, you know, I don't think anybody today would do what we did. You know to stand there, and stand, and stand, he knew earlier the morning that he wouldn't need any help, but we stood there sometimes till nine or after nine o'clock from six to be told that there's no work. It wasn't work that you liked it was work that you did because you had to live. The bright thing in my life was the life around the church, it wasn't... the bright thing wasn't the mills. The mills was a necessity.

O: What were some of the other people that you worked with?

M: There was all nationalities. In the mills there was all nationalities. There was the Portuguese. And in fact we would get very friendly with the Portuguese, because there was quite a lot of them at the International Institute where, you know, we mingled. There was the Greek people too in the mills. There was the Irish. I mean was the mills. You couldn't get a city job with an S-K-I at the end of your name, because this wasn't an international city. It was more or less run by the Irish.

O: So in other words, people weren't...like certain jobs, like city jobs, being a policeman, or...

M: You never as a policeman name that was Polish for years, and years. That came much, much later. Polish people as a rule are not politicians, and I think by not being they lost out, because in order to get anywhere in the city you have to be in with politics. Later on the French got stronger, because there was a lot of French people in the city of Lowell, and they were good people to live with. I mean they weren't aggravating somehow. They were strong. And later on they had their own mayors.

O: How did you feel about it though, being Polish and not having anyone working in the city? Did you ever think about it, you know, [unclear]?

M: I don't think at that time we thought about it. I mean everybody was just concern of making a living, and uh getting ahead. They were saving up to buy homes. They were saving up to send their children to college. This was, you know, this was the mainstay of living. It's to save and get ahead and not bothering that much with politics. We didn't think there was, politics were necessary. Of course we know better, they are!

O: You mentioned that 1931 you got married, and obviously your husband was Polish too?

M: Yes he was.

O: With a name like Podgorski. (M: Right) How did you meet your husband?

M: There was some uh, the church used to run many things. You know, there would be lectures, and there would be dances, and we mingled with Polish even though they were from the other church. My husband came from the other church. We met at one of these affairs. There was friction between the families, because everybody wanted you know, to ah... My mother said I

could never marry in the other church. And I imagine his folks must have felt the same way. Although he, he himself has said that if people didn't support churches there would be no churches. It takes the people to support it in order to keep it, and to him God was everywhere. So he came to my church.

O: Was your mother happy though that you married Polish, and not an Irish person?

M: Well you wouldn't think of marrying...our group didn't think of marrying outside of your own. Although there has been some before me, that had married other nationalities, but it wasn't the thing to do. You know, my son married outside of a Polish people.

O: But of your generation it was...?

M: Of our generation it was to marry your own. All my friends married Polish, most of them from our church, but there was some from the other church. But with my husband there was no friction about church. He was easy going. I guess I was the more dominant in that line. So that uh, it was a Polish wedding. And usually Polish weddings last a week. Mine didn't last a week, but I remember when my mother would talk about the time that she got married in the old country, they would kill a calf, you know, to roast. The women of the village would (bake) for a week, you know group people, you know not only one, but several in order to make...and the wedding went on for a week. I don't think here in America you could afford it. [Laughing].

O: Probably not.

M: But it was a Polish wedding, reception at the Polish hall, and five bridesmaids.

O: Did you have many guests?

M: Oh yes, the hall was full exactly, you didn't count exactly, like you do today. You have to know the amount in order to give to the caterer. The other way they cooked at home. The women helped cooked, there was plenty of food. So it wasn't a matter of just saying so many are coming. You know, you invited who your friends were, most of the church, and the Polish orchestra. It was a nice time.

O: And even after you got married you stayed with Polish, and your children, you raised them to (--)

M: Yah, we...well we stayed. We mingled already then because of the children, because the children had other nationality friends too. So there was more intermingling with other nationalities in through my son then there was with me in my group. Later on as he grew older he belonged to [Demolay], and mingled with different nationalities there. So you had his friends at home too.

O: How many children did....? (M: I just had the one) You just had the one son?

M: Yah.

O: And um, you mentioned he didn't marry Polish.

M: No.

O: Was that a concern for you?

M: Yes it was. (O: Oh it was?) Yes it was! You can't choose their partners, although you try to steer them that way, but I guess the heart plays a different string. He went to work in, during vacation when he was in college he went to work in Block Island, Rhode Island, and he met this girl there, and got friendly in that company. Went in the service after that, but when he came back from the service they got married.

O: And what nationality was that?

M: She is Armenian!

O: Oh really, Armenian. And is she a Catholic Armenian, or an [unclear] Armenian?

M: She is a Baptist Armenian. [Laughs]

O: Oh I didn't realize there were any Baptist Armenians.

M: Her folks were the Orthodox Armenians, but they lived next to a Baptist church, and this is how they got friendly with the Baptist people. And she also has a sister, and they just stayed with the Baptist, while the parents and the grandparents stayed Orthodox Armenians.

O: And your son, how...does he have children?

M: He has two. I gave two grandchildren.

O: And are they with the Polish church, or Baptist?

M: [Laughs] They're not Baptist, and they're not Orthodox, and they're not National, they are Congregationalist. So can you see how it's spreading?

O: Yah, right!

M: I think that was the reason why you kind of wished to keep it your nationality, because then the church loses them. I mean you know, they go different ways and it's just what happens. I love my granddaughter, my daughter-in-law, and my grandchildren, but already they've gone different ways, different roads.

O: You would have preferred for them to stay on [unclear]?

M: Well I can't say I preferred them to stay that way. I would have, yes, but if my son is happy and he has a good life, and nice children, and a nice wife, what can I say?

O: That's enough to make you happy though, right?

M: Right. I mean it's his happiness now and not my, not what I think. You tried to uh...I know when he started going out with this girl, and I said to him one time, I says, "You know your parents are Polish, your grandparents are Polish, your great-grandparents are Polish." And he says, "Mother if you're going that far what nationality was Christ?" Well what's the answer huh?

O: It's Jewish [unclear].

M: Right. (O: Right) So ah, you look at it that way too. But you know he's happy. And I say to my grandchildren, I've got to beautiful grandchildren, and they are now shifting on their own too. They may turn other ways too, because the little girl wouldn't go to an Armenian School when her mother wanted her to go to an Armenian School to pick up the language. She just wouldn't do it, although she is a brilliant girl. And my grandson he just wasn't interested. So they haven't, they don't know the language. So they go to college and they take up French, and they take up Latin, and they don't know the languages of their parents.

O: And your son did he learn Polish? No?

M: Oh, well he stayed by the church growing up, you know, being an altar boy and learning Polish, and learning Polish history, but now he doesn't use it. When his grandmother was living well he would speak Polish to her, but now when he comes here with his wife, like they were here last night with my grandson we all speak English.

O: When you were growing up with your mother you spoke Polish?

M: Only Polish. Polish newspapers in the house. There was no such thing as an English newspaper.

O: Your husband was he from Poland?

M: Oh no he was American born.

O: So between you, you spoke English the two of you.

M: Yes, it's easier. It was easier in English until my son came. Then we tried to speak more Polish so that uh, he would know his Polish, and then when he'd run up to his grandmothers that would be only Polish there.

O: You mentioned your son went to college. Was that very, very important for you that he go to college?

M: Oh yes! His father was a railroad man. He worked for the railroad for forty-eight years. And at one time my son was interested in railroad. And we thought perhaps that you know, he would go that line. But uh, no, he had gone to Wentworth Institute in Boston, and then he went on to the University of Massachusetts, and he's an engineer.

O: Was that a big concern for a lot of the Polish people that their children go on to college?

M: Yes, that was the thing, was to educate so that they'd never have to work like their parents did. So you could have choice of work, and not just being at the mercy of others to hire you.

O: Okay, Mary can tell me a little about the special holidays that you celebrated?

M: Special holidays in Poland, for the Polish people were never birthdays. They celebrate name days. If it was a person's name day the friends would come, and greet and stay, and there would be you know, some refreshments. They were not elaborate refreshments like today you know, the big spreads, but you would sing these songs having to do with name days. Many people didn't no their age, because they never, they never went by years, you know to celebrate this year or that year. It was always just the name day every year. And come St. Joseph's day, which there was so many Joseph's you know, that was the big holiday. St. Joseph's Day was celebrated amongst the Polish like the Irish celebrate St. Patrick's. First of all it fall more or less around lent, or sometimes before lent, or doesn't you know, it varies whenever, because lent doesn't always start on the same day every year. It starts different days. But if it's uh, if it was during...if it was during lent that was the day you didn't have to fast. Like St. Patrick's Day that they make such a, you know, a lot off the Irish people. So like I say, name days were always important. And in the calendar you would cross of St. Catherine Day, or St. Joseph's Day, or you know. And if the priest's name was Joseph, well then St. Joseph's Day would be celebrated all the more because it was your priest name. And we would go there to greet him. That was a big going among the Polish people as well as Christmas. Christmas was always a feast the night before would be this feast of hay on the table under the white table cloth. And they use to say that ah...and wafers, we have wafers that we use for Christmas that you, these wafers are blessed by the priest, and we bring them home. And this Christmas Eve everyone has a piece on their plate. So that the head of the house usually starts and greets everyone, and wishes them, you know, the health, and he breaks the piece of this wafer with you, and all around the table. When it comes your turn, you in turn go around so that...that's always this greeting with this blessed wafer. And even today, like I have people in Poland, I have nineteen people in Poland that I try to take care of. When I send them the Christmas cards, there's always a piece of the wafer in there, so that you're breaking wafer with your family over there. And we have thirteen different kinds of foods, fast foods (coughed and she says excuse me) in memory of the Apostles. And some of these foods you have to you cook ahead of time, because we make a soup where the base of it is fermented. It's fermented with oats, and flour, and a piece of the rye bread that gives it that little sour taste you don't use lemon, you use this, this base. And that's a mushroom soup that we start off with, and the mash potatoes and then the cabbage, and then the peas, and beans, the lima beans, and all the, and rice with raisins, and rice with apples baked. Then we have the stuffed dough that is stuffed with different things other than meat. And usually...and my mother always used to have a large fish that she would have stuffed. Whether that was a symbol of whatever I don't know, but she always had the fish there also. It was such, they was such a



closeness. I can't explain to you the feeling. Today it is gone, because you know, your loved ones are gone, but we tried to keep this up. And this is what you lose when they intermarry. And my daughter being Armenian they don't have this tradition. She comes, she has come here all the years that my son been married to her, but, and then there's a lot of Polish ones, generations after me that are not keeping up this tradition. So that you lose it, and then Easter time is another big, of course church, Christmas is the biggest things because it's a, the church is all decorated. And when they start the first hymn everyone in church sings. It feels like the walls are going to burst, because of the joy that's in you that comes out in song. It was a wonderful time. I mean it's unexplainable, but very meaningful. Easter is the holiest celebration of the year, because of the risen Christ. So that we go to church holy week, and holy Friday is a day that is fasted so that you eat very little. And Saturday you don't eat very much either, but you cook on Saturday, because you have your hams, and your sausages and a veal roasts usually, that's traditional. And you color eggs. You're coloring eggs four and five days ahead of time because we write on the egg. We make designs on the eggs. We just don't only color them, they are designs that...and you write names on them, and you write symbols. So you're doing this ahead of time. And on Saturday morning often mass the priest goes around the houses, and blesses this food. So by Saturday afternoon you have it all on the table, and you have your butter made in design. My mother used to cut out a potato with a design like a rose, and she would mound the butter and then take this potato and go all around so there would be a pattern on the butter. Your roast would be there, your colored eggs, and usually a bunny of some kind if you could afford it. So the food would be blessed, but you never touched that food until after resurrection. You went to church at six o'clock in the morning, and that was called resurrection. And that was another...then you were all dressed up because it was summery and summer clothes, and children would throw flowers in church. You'd carry little baskets of flowers. And I always looked forward to that, because your hair would be curled, and you would always have a nice white dress, always white and the flowers they would go the florist to get...

**Tape I, side B ends**  
**Tape II, Side A begins.**

M: We sold flowers. The priest goes, marches around the church three times with the host, and the organizations, but right after the priests come the little children. The girls with their basket of flowers, and throwing the flowers, the petals in front of the host, and the boys would be carrying lilies. And after...and behind the children would be the woman organizations carrying candles lit, and the men, men's organizations would be behind the...And when the priests would sing alleluia for the first time, then the choir just goes on with this alleluia. And it is so beautiful! After church you go home with your friends and you would have the meal. And there you would start off by slicing an egg, and with the slices of the egg wish everyone around the table, the head of the house would do this, again, health and mostly health always, and happiness and some prosperity. And then it would be the carving of the meat, and horse radish, we always have horse radish. Always you would bake these breads, special breads that are Easter breads, that are something you would bake really only once a year. Some of them are braided, and others are just round with the raisins, and more or less an egg dough, a rich dough, and they are delicious. And then you would always have the homemade butter. And it was ah, and then you'd stay all day, and just stay with family and enjoy one another. So that that's the big

celebration of the Polish people; the name days, their Christmas, their Easters, what else, their weddings, which is something that was quite unusual.

O: What were their weddings like?

M: Hm?

O: What were their weddings like?

M: Well years ago they didn't send out invitations. You know like today the American style is to send invitations. You would go to the home of these people, the bride would with a bridesmaid, with one that was going to be her bridesmaid, and she would ask these people if they would like to come to your wedding. So this is the way you invited people. Then ah, the week before they would, there's a name for it, they called it [sounds like: Smovena], which the wedding party would get together and spend the time, talk and just get to know one another, because many times you would have somebody standing up for you that would come from out of town that wouldn't even know, you know, the ones that she would be with, or he would be with. And then the day before the wedding you would go for the church rehearsal to make sure everything went right that day.

O: Did the wedding usually last long?

M: Well here in America it would be just the one day. And then the following day they would call it a [sound like: Propavena], like an addition to the wedding. And they would come to the house again and they would be partying again. Although in modern times now they eliminated that, because the bride and groom would go away in their honeymoon so they're not there for this party. That's what happened when we got married. We left for our honeymoon. We went to Scranton. So where did you think I asked my husband to go? To meet the Head Bishop of the church.

O: Oh really!

M: So that's where we went. We went to meet the Head Bishop. And he was the organizer of our church. So he was then an old, old man, very humble and very, very so learned that you would just like to sit there and listen to him. He wanted to know how things were going in Lowell, because we got married in 1931 and the church was started many years ago.

O: So the person who had helped originate the church?

M: Yes he was the one that came on to church. And when he came, and I was only little, but I had verses to say, you know, up on the stage because there was a gathering at the Polish Hall, and many, many people there. I had verses to say, and I was only little, but I learned them. I don't know how many verses there was to it, the piece I had to say. And when I got through the Bishop patted me on the head and he says, "That was a very nice my child," you know. And there I was on my wedding honeymoon. I went to see the bishop. Usually people go to Niagara Falls, or you know, somewhere away from anybody you knew, but no, I wanted to go to

Scranton. And my husband, who was such a good man, didn't object at all. So we went to Pennsylvania. And we'd see these men coming out of the mines, because in Pennsylvania are the coal mines. And here they're coming out with their lights on their hats, you know, and carrying their pails, and dark-faced from the coal. And walking around you would see these Quaker children with yellowish complexion, because it seemed to me that in Pennsylvania there was always sort of like a dust. In fact the first night we were there I got coal, a piece of coal dust in my eye. So we had to look around for a drug store and took, you know, took it out. But for a while you think your eye was cut, because you know, it was quite sharp. But the church, I expected a great big mansion, you know, great big church like say the Immaculate Conception. It was a modest church for, for a Cathedral, beautiful inside, but ah (--) And he took us around the church. And he showed us the meaning of all the windows, because all the windows had meaning, you know, meaning to them. And he asked about, he asked me if I knew how to cook. And I said, "Well not very well." And he said, "Well how much is a quart of milk in Lowell?" You know, he wanted to know the price of food. So I told him. And he was quite surprised when I said that my husband was from the other church. I didn't say anything. He listened. And he said, "You should save your money and someday plan to go back to Poland to visit Poland." Well I was back twice.

O: Really!

M: But not till later, later on in 1970 I went back, and then I went back in 1974. I had a brother there. My mother was only able to take me and my brother stay with my grandparents. Then they both died. My grandfather died during the war, and my grandmother lived not long after that. So my brother and later on more or less was alone there. His godmother and my godmother more or less looked after him, but my mother would always send whatever she could to him. But come a holiday there would always be the chair there and that would be my brother's, you know.

O: So your brother remains there?

M: Yes. No, my brother has since died, but he stayed there. He had to go in the... She tried to get him over here, and she saved enough of money, we saved enough of money so that he had enough to come over, but at that time in Poland the currency was marks, and the marks were failing so that when my mother sent him enough money for his, for his fare, by the time he got the papers and the things ready for him to come the value of the marks was so that it wasn't enough. And another time my mother tried to get him over, and she was, he was being sponsored by a farmer, because so if your sponsored by somebody at that time so you wouldn't be a burden to the country they were saying. So my mother got a farmer that sponsored him, but then he was old enough to go in the service. And there it's compulsory. You have to serve two years. Well when he come out of the service he got married. So when he got married my mother said, well you've made your, you know, your bed, and there was a house there. He stayed in the family house so.

O: Did he remain in the village where he was born?

M: Yah, he stayed in the village until after the war when things were so bad. He went on to work for the Red Cross in [Stege], in the part of Germany that at one time was Polish and then Germany took it, they got that part back up around Danzig, and he died there. He was flown home, but he had two sons, my nephews who ah... I only met one son, because another son during the Second World War contacted tuberculosis, and at the age of thirty-nine died, but he was married before and he has two children. So his wife is living and his two children are living. And my other nephew died just a few years ago. He died at the age of forty-eight, which is also young, but he died of a blood clot. And in the village there wasn't the doctor at the time, and by the time they got him into the city, why he died. But I have nineteen people in Poland that I tried to clothe. I send packages and money. So that when I went there they open... If they could carry you on their hands they would. They made so... I went there with my godchild. I had a godchild here, who was very close to me, who I lost last year. And she and her daughter and I went to Poland in 1970. We went on a tour from the church. It's good to go on a tour because you see so much of the country which otherwise you wouldn't see. You go to places of interest. But when we went in 1974, I also went with her and her daughter, we went on our own. She could drive so we hired a car and we toured Poland, and came to the village in an automobile. I think there was three automobiles in the whole village. So an automobile was a, a luxury. The children in the house were just to sit in it. They were pleased just to sit in it even if you didn't take them anyway. But everyday we would take somebody with us and go to places of interest. They lived a simple life. They do have electricity, and they did have a television, but the water was outside. You had to pump, you know, the pump was outside. So you had to pump your water in. But now they have running water, and then they have a bathroom and the children are educated. I mean they're able to go to school now. One of the girls is a school teacher, and the children all have some trade. So that now I, my second grandnephew just got married and my third grandnephew just returned from the service. And I got a letter from him last week, and he said, "Auntie I wasn't, I didn't write to you for two years, because being in the Army you are not allowed to write outside the country." Isn't that something? We don't realize the freedom we have here, you know what I mean?

O: And a when you were in Poland you were to communicate very well?

M: Well I speak fluent Polish. I mean I have no problem whatsoever. My problem was that my godchild doesn't speak Polish so that I would have to interpret, and I was exhausted from talking, because I talked continually. And they were so anxious to know about America. Tell them about America.

O: So you never had any other relatives that came here though?

M: Oh yes, I brought my sister-in-law over here. I think it was eight years ago now.

O: I mean to come live here permanently.

M: Permanently from my family? (O: Yah, from Poland) No, not from my immediate family. I did bring my sister-in-law over for a visit. And she just couldn't believe, couldn't believe what we have here. To take her into a market, you take like Heartland, or Demoulas, or one of those you know, and she would look at the meat in the counter. And what use to surprise her was

somebody would press, ring the bell and she'd say, "Why are they ringing the bell?" I'd said, "Well they don't see what they like." She said, "With all that's there they don't see what they like." This to them was unheard of, because in Poland you live mostly from what you grow. They had the cow, which they had the milk, and cheese, and the chickens for the eggs, and the vegetables they grow; the wheat they grow. They live from the land. In the beginning when we started this church, they first met on Church Street. It was a laundry, just, you know, a place to gather. And then when they had enough of money they built the church up on Rogers Street, and a lot of the people at that time lived around there because a lot of them worked in the leather mills, The Hide and Leather people up on Perry Street. And then as more people came, and began to get work in the mills here, and the people settled around here, because it was so close to the factories here, that they thought it was too far to walk up to Rogers Street. So they sold that church. We sold that church to the Lithuanian people. And up still this day it's the Lithuanian people that own that church. It's a Roman Catholic Church, but it is mostly Lithuanian people. And we built this church on Lakeview Avenue. To me the one on Rogers Street was a nicer church than this one. The reason they built this one as it is with the high steps was the undercroft of the church was the residence of the priests, because they didn't, they didn't have a rectory at the time. So the priests lived downstairs. There was you know, a bathroom, and a sitting room, and you know there was quite a few rooms under that. Later on when there was more money the people built a rectory. So then the undercroft of the church was used for the Polish school. So then they had the tables and the long benches and that's the way (--)

O: So do you always provide a house for your priest?

M: Yes, that is supplied. The house is, and everything, all his living (O: Expenses) are all taken care of by the parish. He gets a salary. Although things like weddings and christenings are his. He will baptize you for nothing, and he will marry you for nothing, but say you wanted to give him something that's up to you, but he is paid for by the parish. We have a wonderful priest, our priest marry, which the Roman Catholic priest are not allowed to marry.

O: I was going to ask you that, yah!

M: So that we have a priest now who is married to the most lovely lady. She's a school teacher. She teaches science in the Dracut Schools. She is also our organist, and she has a beautiful voice. She is very talented and very loveable. We love her. They, we will... It was twenty years on the third of November that they're here with us and we are going to have a dinner on the seventh of December. He doesn't know about it yet. She does, but we're trying to keep it a secret, which I don't think it will happen, because fifteen years ago we also had a banquet for him and we tried to keep it a secret, and towards the time almost to the people would be calling to the rectory, "Does he have any tickets?" [Coughs] Excuse me. So it was pretty hard to keep it a secret because you know, we're quite a large parish.

O: The priest in your church, they're allowed to marry since you split, or did that come later on?

M: Could they marry you mean?

O: When you split, when the two church split. Because I know that the catholic priests don't marry. When you split were they allowed from that moment, from the moment they split [unclear]?

M: No, that came a few years later. Not too, too long afterwards. I don't know the years I would have to look into the books, but they felt it was only right that they marry. You know, they're human beings, and they shouldn't be celibate unless they wish to be. If they don't want to marry it isn't... We have one of our bishops up in the western diocese that isn't married. [Phone rings] Excuse me. [Tape is turned off then on again] Yes, our prime bishop is married, as well as our diocese bishop is married. Our priests are allowed to marry even after they're ordained. Some of them don't. Some of them stay single, but I think we like our priest to be married. It's a home. You know what I mean? He has his wife there and she is also a church worker, which is a help. She's our... This one here is so capable. She's our parish secretary. And we had organists, you know, some organist would come for awhile and then life would take them somewhere else, and we would loose these organists. And it got so that we were having organist that weren't National Catholic. You know, there would be Roman Catholic. And some of them would like to steer a little bit their way you know, which a lot of our hymns are, are similar to their hymns, and some of them are exactly alike, but we also have our own hymns. We have our own church hymn and... So then she started taking organ lessons. And recently we bought a new organ, an Alan organ, one of the newest kind. And she is playing on that organ beautifully. She has a beautiful voice, and she teaches the choir. So that she is so capable and we love her. So to have a priest married, to us, we like it. So this is something that we have, a married priest. So we don't have to, you know, the other church is having problems losing their priests because of they don't want to stay celibate. And they're having problems with their nuns. We have no nuns. (O: You don't have any nuns?) We don't have any nuns at all in the church. We just have the lay women that, that take care of the church. We have women that take care of the linen. And we have women that do church work too, but we are happy with our church. I've been in it so many years I belong to the church committee, and the choir. As old as I am I still belong to the choir. I belong to the women's organization. And to me my life is full of my belonging to the church and mingling with my people.

O: Okay. So I just want to ask you one question. Of all of the years that you lived here in this neighborhood, what are the biggest changes that you've seen?

M: Oh there are changes! I live here in this apartment for forty-six years. Third street at one time was a beautiful street. It was all trees, loads of trees all the way up, and well kept homes, and now it's getting to be run-down. We have people, an influx of the new arrivals that don't care. I don't think they came here to build. I think they came here to ruin. They are taking advantage. I think the government is too lenient. I think the handouts that there's getting are not making these people any better. I see young people that don't work. Sometimes you wonder how their living. I don't like what I see. I really don't. I mean it is a sad thing to say, because I love America. I mean this country has given me everything I have. It's given me a chance to open up my eyes in many ways. I had a chance to make a living, to see my son go to school, and achieve what he wanted. I can't see taking advantage of a country. I think we should give and not take. And to me it's sad. I don't want to name any groups in particular, but I also know that there are newcomers that come, that come from other nationalities like the Portuguese, and they

seem to be striving to, to get ahead to work, this is what you want to see. Now we have a lot of new Polish immigrants. And my heavens they bought up homes in the better sections of the city. They striving for betterment and there not waiting for handouts. In fact if there isn't any work in one place they'll go to another place, and many of them are doing two jobs, men as well as women. Down the street here there's a Polish family. She works in stitching, and weekends she is helping in a restaurant in order to send her son and daughter to college. This you like, this is what America should be, but I don't think America should be taken advantage of!

O: So those are the changes you've seen in here.

M: I've seen the changes and I don't like them!

**Interview ends.**

**JW**